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MAN OF TERROR

by Jack Anderson

For an upstart leader of a nation of fewer than 3 million people—most of them destitute bedouins scattered over a vast desert—39-year-old Muammar Qaddafi of Libya has achieved a unique distinction as the world's No. 1 troublemaker.

This youthful usurper—who in 1969, by an Arabian Nights ruse, beguiled King Idris' police and seized control of Libya—played a pivotal role in the Great Oil Extortion. He showed his Arab neighbors that they could get away with tearing up contracts, imposing unilateral cutbacks, nationalizing oil properties and engaging in political blackmail. He also urged them to use their oil as an economic weapon against the West.

But Qaddafi was not content with economic measures. The petrodollars he extorted from Western customers were used to finance revolutions against their governments. He turned Tripoli, the Libyan capital, into the terrorist capital of the world—a city seething with desperadoes and revolutionaries whom he supplied with weapons, purchased from the Soviet Union, that could shoot down planes and blow up buildings.

He also formed assassination squads and unleashed them to hunt down his adversaries. By the knife, gun and garrote, the hit teams began last year to eliminate Libyan dissidents—four in Rome, two in London, one each in Athens, Beirut and Bonn.

By fall, the violence had spread to the United States. On Oct. 16, Feisal Zagallai, a Libyan student at Colorado State University, was gunned down.

Then in May of this year, the Reagan Administration ordered that Libya close its diplomatic mission in Washington and withdraw its personnel. The State Department cited "a wide range of Libyan provocations and misconduct, including support for international terrorism." The move, officials say, stops one step short of a full break in diplomatic relations with Libya. Meanwhile, the government is holding in readiness contingency plans for reprisals in case Qaddafi attempts serious mischief.

Secret Justice Department files allege that Qaddafi's hit teams were trained and supplied by American mercenaries, specialists in murder and mayhem who learned their skills in the CIA and Army Special Forces.

Witnesses attest that one of the ringleaders, ex-CIA agent Frank Edward Terpil, arranged to lure ex-President Jimmy Carter's wayward brother Billy to Libya. Explained a Justice Department report: "The Libyans may have believed that Billy Carter could influence the actions of his brother, President Carter, on behalf of the Libyan government."

The Libyans also tried to make contacts on Capitol Hill through Sen. Steve Symms (R., Idaho), who invited a few key members of Congress to a secret meeting with Qaddafi aide Ahmed el Shahati.

At the same time that Qaddafi was trying to win friends and influence politicians in the United States, he ordered his pilots to shoot down U.S. reconnaissance planes over the Mediterranean. He contended that they had ventured within 200 miles of the Libyan coastline, which he arbitrarily set as Libya's outer border.

At least seven slow-flying RC-135s were menaced by Libyan jet fighters in international airspace. Qaddafi also demanded that U.S. ships keep out of the Gulf of Sidra, where naval exercises had been scheduled. Though the site was beyond Qaddafi's jurisdiction, the Pentagon obligingly moved the naval exercises into the middle of the Mediterranean last summer.

Thus encouraged to tweak Uncle Sam's beard, Qaddafi violated a pledge to use some American-made 727s strictly for commercial operations. Two of them were spotted ferrying military supplies to the besieged dictator Idi Amin.

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